



## “Just Transition” – Just What Is It?

### An Analysis of Language, Strategies, and Projects

A Joint Project of:

Labor Network for Sustainability  
 11 Pine Avenue  
 Takoma Park, Maryland 20912  
[info@labor4sustainability.org](mailto:info@labor4sustainability.org)  
 website: [www.labor4sustainability.org](http://www.labor4sustainability.org)

Strategic Practice: Grassroots Policy Project  
 1515 Oxford Street, 1D  
 Berkeley, CA 94709  
[rhealey@grassrootspolicy.org](mailto:rhealey@grassrootspolicy.org)  
 website: [www.strategicpractice.org](http://www.strategicpractice.org)

### Table of Contents

<b>“Just Transition” – Just What Is It? .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>An Analysis of Language, Strategies, and Projects.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Part I: History.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Backstory: Jobs with Peace.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Superfund for workers.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Environmentalists and just transition .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Just transition: Just a fancy funeral? .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Climate justice.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Part II: Analysis: .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6. Using the language of just transition .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>7. Unifying vs. divisive effects .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>8. Policies.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>9. Just transition in practice.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Interviews .....</b>	<b>35</b>

## Introduction

We are now one-sixth of the way through the twenty-first century and well into the greatest economic transition ever experienced -- one that will dwarf all that came before this one. This transition includes energy, creating a carbon-neutral economy, communications, manufacturing, transportation, health care, waste management, and more.

This transition has already produced road-kill with many thousands of workers thrown on the scrap heap and disintegrating communities -- with no help in the offing for them. So many individuals and groups are now asking how we organize society, our economy, and our politics in such a way that our institutions serve the people, rather than capital.

The “just transition” frame is being used by an increasing number of organizing networks, grassroots organizations, groups affiliated with organized labor, and environmental organizations. This report aims to assess the notion of just transition, how it is being used, what kinds of ideas and approaches are surfacing for short and long-term strategies, and what kinds of relationships groups are developing in pursuit of a just transition. Its purpose is to open a broad and respectful discussion about the varied ways the “just transition” frame is being used, and whether then can contribute to a shared vision of how to make the transition we face a just transition.

This report is based on 17 interviews conducted between October, 2015 and March, 2016 by Christina Roessler, accompanied at times by Joe Uehlein and Richard Healey. Interviewees were offered the opportunity to revise their quotations and their revisions are included in this draft. This report represents a preliminary effort based on a limited number of interviews and a small amount of additional research. Leaders were interviewed from the following groups:

### **Organizing Networks**

- Climate Justice Alliance
- GreenWave
- National People’s Action
- New Economy Coalition

### **Grassroots organizing**

- ALIGN: The Alliance for Greater New York
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Buffalo PUSH
- Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
- Movement Generation

### **Labor**

- AFL-CIO
- Black Workers for Justice
- BlueGreen Alliance

- Labor Network for Sustainability
- Oregon AFL-CIO

## **Environmental**

- North Carolina League of Conservation Voters
- Sierra Club

Part I, “History,” briefly lays out the historical background of the “just transition” frame.

“1. Backstory: Jobs with Peace,” based on original historical research, traces the idea of a planned transition from its early roots in the GI Bill of Rights, which helped millions of veterans transition from World War II to peacetime education and employment, through proposals from the Cold War-era peace movement for planned conversion from a military to a peacetime economy.

“2. Superfund for workers” summarizes the development, initiated by Oil Chemical, and Atomic Workers leader Tony Mazzocchi, of a plan initially called “superfund for workers” but soon dubbed “just transition,” to provide “a new start in life” for workers threatened by environmental policies.

“3. Environmentalists and just transition” describes the adoption of the concept by parts of the environmental movement.

“4. Just transition: Just a fancy funeral?” describes the resistance that developed to the “just transition” idea within much of organized labor.

“5. Climate justice,” describes the adoption of the term “just transition” and its reinterpretation by the environmental justice and climate justice movements.

Part II, “Analysis,” explores some of the efforts to utilize “just transition.”

“6. Using the language of just transition” illustrates some of the ways that just transition language is currently being used.

“7. Unifying vs. divisive effects” lays out interviewees comments on the impact of just transition language on different groups and their relationships.

“8. Policies” presents a preliminary sketch of policies advocated to realize just transition objectives.

“9. Just transition in practice” presents seven mini-case studies of efforts to embody just transition ideas in concrete social experiments.

The “Conclusion” presents a few reflections.

“Just Transition Core Elements” presents a list generated by an LNS/GPP Just Transition meeting in Washington, DC April 29 of people who were interviewed for the report.

This report represents a collaboration of the Labor Network for Sustainability and the Grassroots Policy Project. The project manager and interviewer was Christina Roessler. Support has been provided by the One World Fund and by the Chorus Foundation.

## Part I: History

### 1. Backstory: Jobs with Peace

At the end of World War II it was widely feared that the end of wartime military spending would send the US economy back into the Great Depression. Economic planning for reconversion to a peacetime economy and the GI Bill of Rights, which provided veterans up to four years of tuition and a living wage, helped forestall mass unemployment and economic dislocation.

During the Cold War every recession was met with an increase in military spending – usually justified by an international crisis but effectively serving to restore economic growth. Many in the peace movement concluded that to end the arms race it would be necessary to ensure jobs and economic prosperity in some way other than such “military Keynesianism.” Industrial engineer and peace activist Seymour Melman argued that planned conversion to a peacetime economy could replace the “permanent war economy.” Economic conversion became part of the peace movement program and peace activists reached out to labor unions on that basis. A Jobs with Peace Campaign organized referendums calling for Jobs with Peace in 85 cities.<sup>1</sup> A more radical conversion-oriented politics, influenced by the German Greens, aimed to “integrate the concerns of material well-being, antimilitarism, ecological balance, and general social renewal” into a project that could unify diverse movements around a common program.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jill Nelson, “Jobs with Peace,” in Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990.) When the Cold War came to an end after 1989, newly-elected President Bill Clinton began planning for major public investment in conversion to an economy with reduced military spending, but they were forestalled by the austerity policies advocated by Robert Rubin and other Clinton officials with Wall Street backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Boggs, “Economic Conversion As a Radical Strategy: Where Social Movements and Labor Meet,” *Building Bridges*.

## 2. Superfund for workers

Tony Mazzocchi was a leader of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union (now merged with the Steelworkers). He was active in bringing trade unionists into the “ban-the-bomb” peace movement. Since he represented atomic workers, he was well aware that disarmament might cost them their jobs. He was also a World War II vet who had gone to college on the GI bill. Putting a new twist on that highly successful program, in the 1970s he proposed that workers whose jobs might be threatened by disarmament should receive similar support.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1990s, following the confirmation of fossil fuel-caused global warming, Mazzocchi revived the idea, calling it a “Superfund for workers” – a play on the recently-established Superfund for toxic cleanup. The Superfund for workers would provide financial support and an opportunity for higher education for workers displaced by environmental protection policies. As Mazzocchi put it in 1993, “There is a Superfund for dirt. There ought to be one for workers.” He argued that, “Paying people to make the transition from one kind of economy - from one kind of job - to another is not welfare.” Those who work with toxic materials on a daily basis in order to provide the world with the energy and the materials it needs “deserve a helping hand to make a new start in life.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Les Leopold, executive director of the Labor Institute and Mazzocchi’s close collaborator and later biographer, “Later environmentalists complained that the word *superfund* had too many negative connotations, and the name of the plan was changed to Just Transition.”<sup>5</sup> In a 1995 speech, Leopold laid out the Superfund for workers/Just Transition proposal. “The basis for Just Transition is the simple principle of equity.” No toxic-related worker should be asked “to pay a disproportionate tax -- in the form of losing his or her job -- to achieve the goals” of environmental protection. Instead, “These costs should be fairly distributed across society.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1996, Les Leopold and OCAW president Bob Wages began “bringing representatives from organized labor together with representatives of frontline communities” to discuss “what a just transition could look like for both.”<sup>7</sup> The result was the formation of the Just

---

<sup>3</sup> Les Leopold, *The Man Who Hated Work and Loved Labor* (White River Junction, VTP Chelsea Green, 2007) p. 415.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Mazzocchi, “A Superfund for Workers,” *Earth Island Journal*, 9(1).

<sup>5</sup> Leopold, p. 417.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Young, “Green-Collar Workers,” *Sierra magazine*, July/August 2003. This article includes considerable additional information on the early history of just transition.

<sup>7</sup> Christina Roessler, “Just Transition Alliance,” unpublished notes provided for this report March 212, 2016. Christina Roessler was at the time director of the French American Charitable Trust which provided funding for this effort. For current information on the Just Transition Alliance, see Just Transition Alliance <http://www.jtalliance.org/docs/aboutjta.html>

Transition Alliance in 1997. Wages was “personally involved” and “played an instrumental role” in the development of relationships with “leaders of the environmental justice movement.” Because he was so involved, “leaders of environmental justice organizations took the meetings seriously” and “put a lot of effort” into “the development of relationships” and “a shared definition and agenda” for just transition. While the Just Transition Alliance continues to this day, Wages’ crucial active involvement ended after the OCAW merged with the United Paperworkers International Union in 1999.

The term “just transition” spread fast in the North American labor movement. By 1997, the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union officially endorsed just transition, as did the Canadian Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union.<sup>8</sup> In 2001, the Service Employees International Union, the largest union in the United States, issued an official energy policy that included a call for Just Transition.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, just transition language and policy spread through the global labor movement.<sup>10</sup> It was used in 1998 in a Canadian union newsletter; by 2000 it was appearing in publications of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (predecessor to today’s International Trade Union Confederation.)<sup>11</sup> The ITUC, which represents 170 million workers in unions all over the world, campaigned for language embodying the just transition principle in the negotiating text of the Copenhagen climate agreement. It read:

An economic transition is needed that shifts global economic growth patterns towards a low emission economy based on more sustainable production and consumption, promoting sustainable lifestyles and climate-resilient development while ensuring a just transition of the workforce.

Similar language was included in the Preamble to the 2015 Paris climate agreement, though not in the body of the agreement itself.

The ITUC said a just transition can be achieved:

Through socially responsible and green investment, low-carbon development strategies, and by providing decent work and social protection for those whose livelihoods, incomes and employment are affected by the need to adapt to climate change and by the need to reduce emissions to levels that avert dangerous climate change.

---

<sup>8</sup> Jim Young.

<sup>9</sup> Jim Young.

<sup>10</sup> Labor Network for Sustainability, “A Just Transition,” <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/post/a-just-transition/>

<sup>11</sup> Rosemberg, Anabella (2010). "[Building a Just Transition: The linkages between climate change and employment](#)" (PDF). *International Journal of Labour Research*.

While the ITUC recognized that just transition policies will be different in different countries and communities, it presented the basic elements as:

- Major public and private investment under long-term sustainable industrial policies to create green jobs and workplaces.
- Identification in advance of the employment effects of climate protection.
- Advance planning to compensate for adverse affects of climate protection.
- Social protections, including social insurance, income maintenance, job placement, and secure access to health, energy, water, and sanitation.
- Training and education for new careers for those affected.
- Wide consultation among stakeholders.
- A “diversification and climate change adaptation plan” for every region and community at risk to provide an alternative to a “free-market adaptation” that will only lead to suffering and opposition to climate measures.
- Protection for the economic life of communities, including new energy technologies and economic diversification.

The ITUC also pointed out that climate change is not “gender neutral.” “Women are generally more vulnerable, representing the majority of the world’s poor and powerless.” The 2004 Asian Tsunami, for example, killed four times as many women as men. Trade unionists believe that “climate justice cannot be achieved without gender justice.”

The ITUC recognized that certain sectors, for example fossil fuel and energy-intensive industries, will be significantly impacted by carbon reduction. This includes such industries as steel, iron, aluminum, power generation, and road transportation. Protecting workers in such sectors requires investment in low carbon technologies and industries, energy efficiency, and retraining. Active labor market policies that redeploy workers from high-carbon to “green” jobs are essential to avoid bottlenecks in the development of the new green economy.

The ITUC recognized that issues of economic justice go far beyond simply protecting those in existing jobs. Rather, it means making the transition to a green economy the means to create one that is fairer overall. “Trade unions propose that employment, income, wealth distribution, purchasing power, gender equity and measures to tackle poverty” should be placed “at the center of discussions.”

### 3. Environmentalists and just transition

The just transition concept and language was also taken up by sections of the environmental movement. According to Aaron Mair, Sierra Club President, just transition represents “a responsible call for a change in processes that are harmful” so that as we “transition to a cleaner way of manufacturing” the government ensures “a smooth transition that provides for workers.” Industry should also “bear the burden of economic liability for transitioning, not workers or the community.” There is “an implied social contract” that “industry is responsible to provide for communities and workers.”

Workers should not be bearing the burden of the environmental costs. Environmental justice communities are already paying with their health, and then they lose their jobs. Just transition ensures a humane and civilized approach. This happens in Europe, but not in the US. In the US, environmental justice communities are economically disposable. We need to emulate European standards. Just transition is an insurance policy for the capitalist system.

Dean Hubbard, Labor and Economic Justice Program Director of the Sierra Club, notes that the SC’s largest campaign is Beyond Coal, and that it also has oil and gas initiatives that are part of its “Our Wild America” campaign. “Just transition language is used in all of those campaigns.”

According to Hubbard, there are two important parts of just transition. First, it provides an opportunity to “transform the economy” to create “high quality jobs, especially in low-income and communities of color.” And it provides the opportunity to “take care of and protect fossil fuel workers and communities” by investing in them as we transition to clean energy.

If there aren’t more jobs created, if regions are left to market forces alone, people will be disproportionately affected. It’s one of the many challenges of neoliberal policies - the jobs our economy generates tend to be offshore, contingent, and privatized.

Mike Williams of the BlueGreen Alliance notes that, “From its founding, the BGA took just transition seriously.” BGA’s core belief is that just transition is “not just about giving people money.” Just transition needs to mean, “there’s direct help to people who lose their jobs along with an economic development plan.” Environmental groups in the BGA, including the Sierra Club, NRDC, National Wildlife Federation, and the Union of Concerned Scientists, advocate “support for workers losing their jobs.” Williams says that while BGA “supports expanding the clean energy economy,” the organization works with labor and environmental organizations to deal with the practical implications of that transition—specifically “working with labor unions about how to support impacted workers and communities.”

#### 4. Just transition: Just a fancy funeral?

Both the term and the concept “just transition” have met strong resistance among many workers, unions and the AFL-CIO. That resistance is deeply rooted in the experience of American workers and trade unionists. As Brad Markell of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Council explained, “It’s very important to us that we build an understanding of the experience working people have had for the last 40 years. People’s gut feeling is that if this transition happens in the current political economy, they’re going to be left out.”

Workers who have had well-paying jobs have seen big changes and the working class feels it’s gotten the short end of the stick. Holding onto fossil-fuel jobs is seen as the only way to maintain a decent life for them and their families. They’ve seen when their friends and family lose their jobs life is hard. Working people are afraid of change that involves job loss.

“There’s lots of resistance and resentment of the term just transition,” Markell says. To explain why, he quotes Cecil Roberts of the United Mine Workers: “I’ve never seen one.” And he quotes AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka: “Just transition is just an invitation to a fancy funeral.” Markell notes that one-quarter of the coal industry has been put out of business, but “there’s been nothing for the coal workers.” We know “workers are going through a transition,” but “they don’t feel that it’s just.”

Markell notes that “In the international arena people in organized labor use the term just transition.” The International Labor Organization put together a guidebook on just transition. As part of the international labor movement, US labor has been asking for it in negotiations on the climate agreement. But domestically “the term is seen as a smokescreen.” He concludes that first, “We’ve got to make it real.”

The AFL-CIO’s approach to just transition is evolving. Although it has frequently pointed out the harm that workers and communities might face from climate protection policies, the AFL-CIO has never proposed a “just transition” plan to protect them. In its statement in response to the Paris climate agreement, however, it noted that “workers in certain sectors will bear the brunt of transitional job and income loss.” Recognizing that reality, it endorsed the Paris agreement’s recognition of “the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs.” It called for investment in the affected communities and “creating family-supporting jobs like those that will be lost.”

This evolution is also occurring elsewhere in the labor movement. Barbara Byrd, Secretary-Treasurer of the Oregon AFL-CIO, notes that she first heard the term “just transition” at a UN climate conference in 2009. When she got back she started using it in Oregon and got push back from some labor unions: “They said not to use it because when their members hear it, it means you’re assuming they’ll lose their jobs.” Now, however, there is again discussion about using just transition language. The Steelworker’s Union in particular seems to recognize “they’ve got to find a way to talk about it if they want to influence conversations about climate change and clean energy.” From their perspective,

just transition should always be seen as a last resort; “They say we need to put a human face on the loss of jobs and wages and how that affects workers.” If there is going to be a transition to clean energy it needs to be gradual enough; take into account the special circumstances of workers being affected; and provide a Superfund for workers.

She adds that an additional challenge is the “head in the sand” issue -- the belief that some people in organized labor have that “transition to clean energy isn’t going to happen in the near future” or that “it’s way down the road” so they don’t need to prioritize the issue.

## 5. Climate justice

The language of “just transition” was adopted and spread, but also reinterpreted, with the emergence of the climate justice movement that precipitated out of the mainstream climate protection movement as the 21<sup>st</sup> century began. International relations scholar Shannon Gibson, who studied the emergence of the climate justice movement firsthand, characterized the advocates of the climate justice frame as focused on the relation of climate change to economic and social justice. They advocated “system change” as opposed to “traditional governmental ways of dealing with climate change.” Through these framing efforts, “climate justice” became “a global rallying cry, shifting activists’ criticisms away from technocratic claims that targeted policies, negotiators, and specific governments toward a more antisystemic approach” which criticized “developed countries,” “global governance,” and “neoliberal capitalism” in the context of climate change.

The climate justice frame drew on a “radical environmentalism” which held that the “enduring power structures of sovereignty, capitalism, scientism, patriarchy and even modernity generate and perpetuate the environmental crisis while consolidating structural inequalities between the global North and South.” It drew on various “transgressive frames,” including “indigenous cosmology, deep ecology, social ecology, political ecology, environmental justice, ecofeminism, and eco-anarchism.”<sup>12</sup>

Michael Leon Guerrero, who was active in the emerging climate justice movement as National Coordinator of the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, recalls that “they weren’t using just transition language” before the start of the discussions that led to the formation of the Climate Justice Alliance in 2010. He became exposed to the concept of Just Transition in the early 90’s as the Just Transition Alliance was founded to connect workers and frontline communities. He learned of the Million Climate Jobs Campaign for the first time at the UN COP in Durban, South Africa, in November, 2011, launched by thousands of workers from many countries and unions internationally. In this campaign he saw potential to connect the need for Just Transition to confronting the climate change crisis.

Gopal Dayaneni of Movement Generation says he learned about just transition both from the Just Transition Alliance and from people in organized labor. Movement Generation came to just transition from “an environmental justice frame.” Movement Generation adopted and has been “actively propagating” the just transition frame. That is “part of

---

<sup>12</sup> Shannon M. Gibson, *Dynamics of Radicalization: The Rise of Radical Environmentalism against Climate Change*, dissertation, 2011. Gibson’s dissertation is focused on the organization Climate Justice Now! which functioned within the UNFCCC’s annual Council of Parties (COP) gatherings. For the rise of the climate justice movement, see also Jeremy Brecher, *Climate Insurgency* (New York: Routledge, 2016) p. 30-35. “Antisystemic movements” have been defined as defined as “political groupings that oppose and resist the prevailing productive forces and relations in a given historical era.”

how it's moved out in the world." Movement Generation helped found the national network Climate Justice Alliance, which has been "redefining what just transition means" and are "innovators in just transition work." Ajamu Dillahunt says Black Workers for Justice were introduced to just transition through the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, which is a member of the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA). Aiden Graham of the North Carolina League of Conservation Voters says, "I first came to the language through Movement Generation."

Miya Yoshitani of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network describes how the just transition framework and language were transformed in the climate justice context in the years after 2010.

As one of the community-based environmental justice groups engaged in the Just Transition Alliance in the 1990's, APEN was part of a project to bring together refinery workers with OCAW and "fenceline" community members to surface some of the inherent tension, explore common ground, and talk about what a just transition for workers and impacted communities could look like. This early work to bring together labor and community voices was the foundation of APEN's approach to just transition.

Years later, as a member of the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, APEN joined other GGJ groups in a "climate justice alignment process" to talk about a long-term vision, from the perspective of "frontline" communities, for climate justice. This set of groups, including the Indigenous Environmental Network, Black Mesa Water Coalition, Communities for a Better Environment, Jobs with Justice, POWER, East Michigan Environmental Action Council, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, APEN and several others, were part of the GGJ Global Wellbeing Committee, and after several years of being engaged in grassroots delegations to United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties, or COP, meetings felt that they needed a more clearly articulated and commonly held vision for climate justice to be more effective and aligned in their organizing response to climate change here in the United States.

Most of these organizations, like APEN, had decades of experience organizing frontline communities around environmental justice issues at the intersection of race, poverty and pollution and saw the threat of climate change as a terrible yet logical extension of the same root causes of the extractive economy. They were able to draw on these similarities in the local organizing fights against many of the same multinational corporations and developers, as well as the overlap in the transformational solutions that these same communities had been campaigning for over many years.

Alongside the frontline organizations there were a handful of "movement support organizations" like the International Policy Institute, the Movement Strategy Center, the Center for Story Based Strategy, and Movement Generation, who were playing a supportive role in the alignment process and helping this set of

organizations with the visionary framework for climate justice that ultimately came to be called the “Just Transition Framework”.

At first these groups just tried to get aligned on the language and concepts. It was a very iterative process. The question was: how to transition away from dirty and extractive industry to something better? Work and jobs need to be created on a massive scale and they need to build wealth locally and keep it there. This understanding led to a more complex sense of direction. They wanted to come up with what a long-term alternative could really look like, on the ground, and as a movement. Trying to answer those questions took them to the new just transition frame. So just transition became a more holistic approach encompassing both the need to end the extractive economy and a vision for healthy, thriving, and connected local economies in its place – a view that included, like the original just transition definition did, the needs of workers and impacted communities in the transition. It moved them from a reactive approach to one that’s more proactive and visionary.

As the term has become more widely used there has been some tension over the use of the just transition term and framework and how the origins of the framework are acknowledged and understood. Ultimately, the feeling is that we have to address the impacts of climate change equitably, for frontline communities and frontline workers and that it’s going to take a strategic and intersectional process to arrive at a positive result. And that the process is just as important as the outcome.

Burt Lauderdale, executive director of Kentuckians for The Commonwealth, explained the origins of the Appalachian Transition Initiative (ATI). Started in 2010, ATI was a joint initiative to promote “a public conversation about the need and opportunity for a just economic transition in Appalachia.” Within KFTC it is linked to economic justice, New Energy, Transition, and the Canary Project. ATI “had a big discussion about what language to use” and made “a deliberate choice” to use just transition. They “chose to stay with transition language because that was what they meant.” They were talking about “changing from the old power economy to a new economy.” There is a wide spectrum within KFTC of how different staff members are using the just transition language and frame; “it’s constantly evolving.”

Aiden Graham and Justine Oller of the North Carolina League of Conservation Voters (interviewed jointly) say their explicit work related to just transition began in 2015 “working to develop a vision for a just transition to a clean energy economy in North Carolina.” PowerUp NC, the field program they’ve developed at NCLCV, draws on the conceptual framework developed by Movement Generation. PowerUp NC’s understanding of just transition is that “the climate crisis is a symptom of intersecting crises in environmental, economic, and political systems.” The only solution is “systemic shift.” There is an opportunity to do that “in a way that transforms the economy as a whole.” Anything else is “a Band-Aid fix.”

They started their program on just transition “to look at root causes of problems and to bring justice and environmental work together, to talk about general quality of life, and to build something new.” Just transition is now a guiding principle that drives all of their work. They are looking at housing and gentrification; linking housing justice to utility justice; creating green jobs through economic development plans; and developing a community-driven plan for a green careers pipeline.

According to Aaron Bartley of PUSH Buffalo, the organization was introduced to just transition language by a local ally that was working on a coal plant shutdown campaign. PUSH started using just transition language 2½ years ago. PUSH considers itself to be “in the middle of the adoption process in terms of the use of JT language and concepts.” They moved the use of the language out through trainings they did. While the language is not used universally, it hasn’t been rejected. “Once people know what it means, they use it.”

## Part II: Analysis

### 6. Using the language of just transition

As just transition language has filtered into different contexts over time, its use and meanings have changed and diverged. Different groups have used it to mean different things, and, as part of the same process, they have used it to address different constituencies for different purposes. In reviewing the interviews conducted for this report, it is apparent that denotation, connotation, use, and constituency are frequently intermingled. For that reason, this section does not aim to classify different denotations – literal meanings -- for the term, but rather to show ways that various interviewees are using it.

Brad Markell of the AFL-CIO, despite his reservations about the term, emphasizes the resonance of just transition language in the international labor movement. “The beautiful thing about the language of just transition though is that it really works nationally and internationally to talk about vulnerable workers in communities. Whether they’re in Bangladesh or here folks get what it could mean.”

Mike Williams of the BlueGreen Alliance says there is a wide spectrum of how different staff members are using the just transition language and frame; “it’s constantly evolving.” The forces driving a shift to clean energy—including natural gas prices and cost competitive renewable energy—mean that the projects BGA is working on where they are using just transition concepts are all related to coal. In southwestern Pennsylvania “we held stakeholder discussions and meetings to assess the impact of closing coal-fired power plants and how to find creative solutions to transition through the implementation of the Clean Power Plan.” BGA organizers are also currently working in Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and Minnesota, and have worked in Missouri and Montana. In all of these places policies that create quality clean energy jobs and transition for impacted workers and communities are part of the discussion around the Clean Power Plan because “the practical implementation of solutions to climate change cannot be separated from the conversation on jobs and the economy.” Solutions need to focus on “providing this assistance through federal, state or local revenues.”

It’s no easy task to talk about transition with the workers and communities impacted. However, as the nation transitions to clean energy, it is critical to have these conversations and to be proactive about policies and investments that can help bridge that gap. BGA worked with people on the ground in Colstrip, MT, where many are concerned that a power plant and mine are at risk of being shut down. It is one of only a few unionized mines west of the Mississippi where workers have been “willing to engage in a discussion about the impacts of this shift to clean energy and how to be on the forefront of that issue.” However, “the term Just Transition leaves a bad taste in their mouths” because “to them transition means they’re losing their jobs.” But the bottom line is that we have to work to both create quality clean energy jobs, assistance, and economic development support for impacted workers and communities.

For Joe Uehlein of the Labor Network for Sustainability, “the meaning of just transition is very holistic, and very much focused on what’s happening with working people today.” The concepts of just transition are “embedded in all the work LNS does.” The absence of a real just transition approach for workers has been “holding back unions” and “preventing them from participating in discussions about climate change.” With labor people it won’t work if the talk about just transition is only in utopian terms—“that’s just not real to them.” Organized labor is grounded in thinking about “jobs, wages, and grievances,” so whatever the discussion “it has to be real.” When we say that for LNS the meaning of Just Transition is very holistic, we mean that “we believe it is possible to work for the great leap forward, a transition away from capitalism and toward local democratic economies, while at the same time fighting for what working people need today.”

Movement Generation’s Gopal Dayaneni notes that, “Some people are concerned that the way MG uses just transition is way too radical because it’s also about resisting capitalism.” Other people are concerned because “just transition language doesn’t speak to everyone.” Dayaneni’s own discomfort is that “just transition doesn’t explicitly speak to the nature of the disruption” that it will take “to get us where we need to go.” The word “transition” makes it sound like “a smooth, almost easy process.”

Dayaneni says that, “in terms of folks on the ground, where people are exposed to just transition language, like in Richmond, California, and Eastern Kentucky, it seems to be working.” When it is contextualized for people it works: “People will embrace the frame if it’s meaningful to them.” The one place just transition doesn’t have as much traction is within organized labor. “It’s gotten a reputation of being about transitioning workers for jobs that don’t exist.” But when MG presents its vision of just transition to workers and organizers in organized labor, “folks get excited.”

He says the “big question” is, “what does it mean to transition whole communities and whole economies?” Movement Generation wants to “get workers to redefine industries themselves.” Just transition has lots of traction now because “it’s a way of talking about system change that’s visionary and proactive.” It encompasses “culture shift, mind shift, and repurposing of economy.”

There was a “long-term bubbling” within Kentuckians For The Commonwealth,” according to Lauderdale around just transition language and thinking. It was “a very organic evolution” for their political theory. KFTC pivoted from primarily “resistance” to “what do we want to see?” When they started using transition language, “people understood that meant change.” They got resistance to the language, “so they knew they were on the right track.”

The KFTC just transition theory is “visionary and aspirational.” It doesn’t mean compensation or buy-out. Just giving people money isn’t necessarily a goal for KFTC or the communities it works in. The just transition language and frame needs to be “visionary, unifying, place-based, and generative.” Lauderdale is concerned that “the way

a lot of people are using just transition language now” is to mean “compensation -- without any of the political meaning left.” They get “locked into transition as an income concept” before they “know about or understand the broader historical meaning of just transition.”

Miya Yoshitani of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network notes that, “APEN is not stuck on the language, but is really interested in the concepts.” They don’t use just transition language with all of their members, but “the concepts really resonate with their members.” It is the first time they’ve seen “so much enthusiasm across sectors for a concept like this.” APEN is excited that National People’s Action and Center for Community Change NPA and CCC are getting on board.

A rather different experience is reported by Matt Ryan of ALIGN. He says he doesn’t hear just transition language used often even in the environmental justice community in New York City; “they use more of an equity frame.” He says ALIGN uses just transition language somewhat, “but it’s been a mixed bag.” In some cases “it’s fallen flat.” ALIGN is struggling with strategic communications because “just transition is tainted enough with their constituencies that it doesn’t work with a lot of their core audiences.” If it is not used in an on-going organizing effort “it’s a trigger that’s associated with plant closings, risk, environmental concerns generally trumping empathy and support for workers.” ALIGN needs something that communicates a vision and idea. It is not clear in New York City what the transition is.

According to Ryan, just transition language works best with climate resiliency transition work. On the resiliency side the question is, “what are communities going to need to adjust?” The just transition framework is more about “creating a decentralized energy grid” and “how to close the gap of pre-existing inequities and to create jobs.” Just transition has to factor in residential displacement: “That’s the Trojan Horse for moving people out and redevelopment in NYC.” The problem for people is “how to live in NYC and afford a place that’s safe and sustainable.”

Ajamu Dillahunt reports that just transition language is new to Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ). “It’s not used now externally, but it is used internally.” It is “a concept that’s easy to grasp.” It includes racism and environmental racism.” It is about “what are the social and political forces that lead to racism and climate change?”

Just transition fits into things BWFJ has been working on for years. For example, it is bringing new thinking to the discussion about jobs. Dillahunt uses just transition language to ask, “what happens to jobs” if we make change “as fast as we need to in order to address climate change?” The conversation is “talking about jobs and the people who are going to lose them.” We also need to consider and talk about “the people who haven’t had access to jobs to begin with.”

The just transition frame stimulates a range of vigorous conversations. It raises the question of “a change in the way the economy and the markets are structured.” It is “a question of democracy.” It raises questions about the cost of energy: “Energy bills are

super high for poor people.” And it brings in discussion of “coop models and other new ways of thinking about and organizing economic life.”

I can’t think of better language. It’s visionary and oriented towards solutions. We need a transition in the economy and in politics. Labor isn’t dealing with this at the moment. They’re more focused on contracts and membership issues. These things are important but can’t be separated from the serious challenges of climate change.

Like Matt Ryan, Jordan Estevao of National People’s Action points out that the phrase just transition “means different things to different people,” and that its definition “depends on the situation.” NPA doesn’t see it as “narrowly about workers and jobs for displaced workers.” It is about “how to move from an extraction economy to one that’s about creation and life.” Just transition “speaks to the need to move away from our current system to another system.” The phrase has been very helpful in that “it implies that when we are against something (fossil fuel extraction, concentrated pollution, greenhouse gases, etc.) we are also in favor of alternatives.”

NPA is trying to engage folks who aren’t using that language. They more often use language like the new economy or justice or energy democracy. “The ideas are important, but not the specific language.” NPA hasn’t really tested just transition language. They are not intentionally using it externally, but they are using it internally with NPA staff. “There hasn’t been a deep discussion about the vocabulary and usage of just transition language,” but “we do have lots of conversations about the structural changes needed to attain just transition in its broad sense.”

Jonathan Rosenthal of the New Economy Coalition says just transition is “not a term that comes up that often.” It is in the vocabulary of folks in NEC, but not in daily use. “Capitalism is used more often.” There’s not a clear definition of just transition: “It’s fuzzy, so it is not as useful.” Just transition is “a broad term that means different things to different people. We are also struggling with ‘new economy’ as that is a very broad concept as well. Our metanarrative project is building a framework to support a more useful set of narratives, built on the work of our growing network, that will give people a tangible and dynamic way to understand that another way is possible and happening.”

NEC leans towards smaller, more tangible projects like community finance and worker cooperatives, as well as more scalable projects such as divest/reinvest efforts. A transition conversation is less common; their conversation is “more about the ravages of the old economy.” The just transition conversation is coming up more in the divest/reinvest work, which requires a discussion about transition. Rosenthal says he brings it up a lot and tries to talk about transition strategies. “NEC is about connective tissue, so just transition concepts are useful.” He feels that just transition is “a very important concept” for NEC and “they need to breathe more life into their use of it.” “Building bridges from the old economy to the rapidly expanding new economy requires a just transition.”

Aaron Bartley of PUSH Buffalo finds just transition language very useful. It is, “a great way to address issues related to climate change especially as they relate to the disproportionate impacts to low-income communities and communities of color.” He likes just transition because “it blends climate justice with economic and racial justice.” It goes beyond just a “green” frame. PUSH is “very high on the green jobs frame for economic equity for underserved populations: It’s working for them.” It makes climate work “more tangible and real.” PUSH sees the work “not just about the future of the planet; it’s also about a new economy.” The just transition concept “creates the bridge they need.” Bartley says he doesn’t normally like changing frames and language once something has been established, “but when they were introduced to just transition, it resonated.”

While the sometimes vague and shifting meanings of just transition may at times present problems, their diversity may not be exclusively a liability. Terms with vague and shifting meanings can play a constructive role at certain points in political discourse. The slogan “Another world is possible!” shed little light on what a possible or desirable “other world” might be, but at a particular point in time it powerfully expressed and unified a rejection of the Thatcherite view that “there is no alternative” to neoliberal capitalism. Whatever its denotation, “just transition” appears to evoke for many people the idea of a shift to a significantly different and more just society. That does not imply that such vague language can substitute in the long run for a more concrete specification of what such a society might be or how it could be attained.

Such a use diverges from the more narrow and specific use of just transition to signify a program to protect workers whose jobs are threatened by the transition to a climate-safe economy. This use is often accompanied by policy proposals along the lines of a Superfund for workers. And it is often encapsulated in the slogan “No Worker Left Behind!” Whatever the fate of the term “just transition,” it is clear that both the wider and the narrower definitions refer to important ideas; that both require distinct terminology to clearly refer to them; and that in the context of a wider program for change the two may not be contradictory.

## 7. Unifying vs. divisive effects

Many of the interviews provide information and comment on ways that just transition language serves to draw together or divide different movements and constituencies.

Just transition can continue to divide its advocates from workers who experience it as a threat. Aiden Graham and Justine Oller of the North Carolina League of Conservation Voters recounted how they'd originally envisioned building a Just Transition Roundtable and a related Just Transition plan for NC through their work with the Labor Network for Sustainability. They wanted organized labor at the table involved in the discussions, but they weren't aware of the history of organized labor in relation to just transition. In labor terms, "just transition" means a path or plan for those workers displaced by transformations in the economy. In relation to climate change for example that could mean electrical workers displaced from jobs in coal plants. Labor unions, such as the IBEW, tasked with representing their current members who work in both the fossil fuel and the clean energy sector occupy a tricky position.

It became clear at an early meeting that the language of Just Transition would set some participants from organized labor on edge and compromise the ability of one of our key partners at the state federation from playing an explicit role. At the meeting it looked for a moment like it might be a make or break issue. Joe Uehlein suggested shifting the language and calling the project a Climate and Jobs Roundtable instead. Everyone involved agreed that for the time being that made sense. Internally however "Just Transition" has continued to be used as a guiding principle.

Another example was in Graham's first meeting with a representative of the IBEW. They had "a great conversation" because, although the union officially opposes the Clean Power Plan and similar regulations of carbon emissions, he "led with a discussion of green energy and the potential for job creation." We found a lot of common ground, particularly in talking about the explosive growth of the solar industry in North Carolina. We even touched on "the need to fight for retirement packages and job retraining for workers from closing plants, but only after we'd cut the ice talking job creation." He concludes, "There seems to be a lot of potential for good talks with labor if you're not attached to leading with the term just transition."

Just transition should also address issues that divide industrial workers from low-income community residents. Brad Markell notes that in places like Richmond, CA, "community folks don't work at the plant but are adversely affected by pollutants." Conversely, the workers in the plants mostly don't even live in the community, "so there's a lot of tension around cutting pollution if it could mean jobs at risk."

Joe Uehlein points out that there are a couple of "Achilles heels" when trying to draw together environmentalists and labor around climate change. Environmentalists have never been able to understand "the primacy of work in people's lives" so their messaging is "tone deaf" to the needs and aspirations of working people. Labor unions have never found a way to "embrace and adjust to changes in the economy." "As the American

economy has changed and grown away from us, we tend to circle the wagons and protect what we have,” even as that slice shrinks, rather than find a way to embrace and organize the new economy. Jobs have moved to other countries and wages have stagnated. We are “always playing catch up” because our inability to adjust to changes on the economy has us “behind the eight ball.”

Despite such divisions, a number of interviewees noted that the just transition language and concept can also play a role in bringing different groups together. Miya Yoshitani of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network observed, “the strength of the just transition framework is that it allows for a more conceptual alignment around the approaches.” It is “very helpful in alliances and movement relationships.” Burt Lauderdale of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth says that KFTC’s approach with allies has been to “keep repeating just transition,” and also to “let groups make the language and frame their own.” As a result “they don’t always mean the same thing.” Nonetheless, “allies are moving forward in the same direction.”

Aaron Bartley of PUSH Buffalo says just transition is important in part because “it has the potential to help build a bridge between urban and rural issues and constituencies.” Just transition is “not a term that’s initially crystal clear and that rallies the masses.” It needs to be explained. It creates “both a bridge and an umbrella in terms of thought systems.” Just transition “helps people understand systems.” It is at the nexus of inequality and climate. “That’s what we need to focus on and if just transition is at that nexus it’s useful terminology.”

Just transition is also “shared terminology.” PUSH works on the state level in close alliance with over 60 groups that represent environmental justice, labor, social justice organizations and environmental advocates (NY State Energy Democracy Alliance and NY Renews) on energy efficiency and renewable targets particularly in relationship with low-income constituencies. “Just transition language is used by these allies in a range of ways, and it’s gaining currency.” PUSH also uses just transition language with “policy types” and with “legislative and labor communities”; PUSH uses it in Albany (New York state capitol] as part of its frame. In addition it has been “moving the language out in a regional alliance -- the Crossroads Collective -- especially in trainings in the last three months.”

Barbara Byrd of the Oregon AFL-CIO is working with the Coalition for Communities of Color in Oregon, for whom “just transition means something different.”

They want to take advantage of the opportunity to make sure money available for clean energy transition is used in a way that also cleans up impacted communities and generates jobs for people in those communities. They want to be involved in just transition in order to change and build a new economy and create jobs.

She feels the goals of communities of color and organized labor are compatible. Indeed, when she talks with folks in low-income communities she often finds “more in common

with them and the way they see just transition than in discussions with environmentalists.”

Brendan Smith of GreenWave says, “You can’t have a just transition that just cares about coal miners, or that just cares about poor people of color in Detroit—you have to address work for both.” You have to do that “for both political and moral reasons.” On the political side, “you’re never going to build a new economy unless you build bridges with all of these constituencies” because “you need enough power to make the changes, and power comes from diversity.” You need “both racial and economic diversity.” The Keystone XL conflict shows how such an issue can play out badly; there “the environmentalists and community groups were fighting with workers who wanted jobs.” We need to be “providing opportunity for workers in general and not shifting jobs from one set of workers to another.” “The beautiful thing about just transition” is that “it allows us to get the morality, politics, and economics right.”

## 8. Policies

Different concepts of just transition entail rather different kinds of policy proposals. Starting with the original Superfund for Workers proposal, advocates for protecting workers and their communities from adverse impacts of climate policies have devised a string of proposals, including programs based on the GI Bill of Rights and economic development funds and programs.<sup>13</sup>

Some of these proposals have recently been embodied in the “Clean Energy Worker Just Transition Act” proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Edward Markey (D-Mass.)<sup>14</sup> The bill initially targets coal workers, but over time expands to other energy sector workers as well. It provides unemployment insurance, health care, and pensions for up to three years and job training and living expenses up to four years. Employers receive tax incentives to hire transitioning employees. Counties where 35 or more workers become eligible for the program can receive targeted development funds. The right of workers to join unions is protected by streamlining NLRB union recognition provisions. The bill covers the estimated \$41 billion cost of the program by closing the tax loophole that allows corporations to send their headquarters overseas to avoid paying taxes.

Just transition proposals have also been incorporated in a number of studies oriented toward broader issues of jobs and climate protection. The recent LNS study “Employment After Coal: Creating New Jobs in Eastern Kentucky”<sup>15</sup> prepared by Frank Ackerman of Synapse Energy Economics lays out a plan to replace half of the current jobs of Eastern Kentucky coal miners while reducing the region’s unemployment rate to the national average. The plan is based on expanding six economic sectors: energy efficiency, local food production, health care, sustainable forestry and wood products, tourism, and environmental remediation.

Joe Uehlein of the Labor Network for Sustainability says a just transition could “look like an expanded GI Bill of Rights” for workers. They would get health care and other benefits like pensions, education of their choice, training, and perhaps a guaranteed annual income for four or five years. There would have to be block grants for economic development and other assistance for communities.

Uehlein says that to really provide workers with a just transition would require a national program like building the national highway system, going to the moon, or winning World

---

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of such proposals, see Jeremy Brecher, “A Superfund for Workers: How to Promote a Just Transition and Break Out of the Jobs vs. Environment Trap,” *Dollars&Sense*, November/December, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/download/worker-just-transition-act-summary?inline=file>

<sup>15</sup> <http://climatejobs.labor4sustainability.org/eastern-kentucky-report/>

War II.<sup>16</sup> “It needs to be big, and it needs to be a federal program.” There should be a “surcharge on polluters.” As a nation “we have the money, it’s a question of how we choose to spend it.”

The LNS report “Jobs Beyond Coal: A Manual for Communities, Workers, and Environmentalists”<sup>17</sup> recounts a variety of examples in which unions, community groups, environmentalists, and government cooperated to provide a transition for workers affected by the closing of coal-fired power plants. Based on these experiences, it recommends “key protections for workers and their communities” that coal-retirement campaigns can demand from coal power plant employers and public officials and agencies who negotiate with them:

- Negotiate a jobs agreement with unions representing affected workers.
- Find jobs for affected workers who want them.
- Ensure job retraining for those who need it to fill new jobs.
- Provide decent pensions with healthcare for workers who are not provided other jobs and who do not opt for retraining.
- Create jobs restoring the site.
- Reutilize facilities to replace losses in tax base.
- Fund job-creating community economic development.

Protections should apply to all affected workers, including those in supply and transportation.

Brad Markell of the AFL-CIO emphasizes that, “for just transition to be real it has to be about more than simply training.” “Training doesn’t create jobs; jobs create training. A parking lot attendant with a PhD is still a parking lot attendant.” If there were good jobs out there they would be filled. When people talk to workers who are being paid decent wages and talk about transition strategies where jobs pay \$10-12/hour, “that doesn’t work.”

Public policy has to be about “driving investment to places where jobs are lost”; making sure that “jobs are created that are good, family supporting jobs”; and that there are “precursors to economic development.” There have to be “good transportation systems, schools, health care” and “it all has to be adequately funded.” Training programs should emulate those of the building trades: “When people enter a building trades apprenticeship they’re trained for a career, not just a specific job.”

Markell also cautions, when working with workers “you can lay out general notions, but you can’t be too prescriptive.” There needs to be “deep consultation with folks on the

---

<sup>16</sup> For a climate transition strategy drawing on World War II as a model, see Jeremy Brecher, Ron Blackwell, and Joe Uehlein, “If Not Now, When: A Labor Movement Plan to Address Climate Change,” *New Labor Forum*, 2014.  
[http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/NLF541793\\_REV1.pdf](http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/NLF541793_REV1.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://report.labor4sustainability.org>

ground” including “labor unions and experts on local and regional economics.” A big element is “worker voice.” “True justice can only be socially constructed.”

Barbara Byrd of the Oregon AFL-CIO sees California’s AB 32 cap-and-trade law as a good model because “it sets money aside for affected communities and workers,” and there’s an implementation committee that includes “low-income constituents and workers.” She’s hopeful Oregon can pass a similar bill in its next legislative session.”

She thinks this model is “the place to start.” She supports a similar bill that has been introduced in Oregon that she thinks has “all the right stuff” in it.

Dean Hubbard says the Sierra Club has developed four principles of economic justice. They are that “a clean energy economy should provide good careers”; “communities and workers dependent on fossil fuels for their livelihoods need to be protected”; “low income and communities of color should get their fair share of benefits of a clean energy economy”; and “clean energy needs to be affordable.” He would add a fifth principle: “democratic accountability.” The Sierra Club is in the process of developing metrics for these principles.

Brendan Smith of GreenWave notes that the GreenWave model “requires policy work.” For example, it is necessary to help “secure access to ocean acres at low-entry costs.” GreenWave worked on legislation called the Seaweed Jobs Bill that “capped the lease rate for ocean farming in our area to \$25/acre.” To get the legislation “we framed it as a way to generate hundreds of jobs,” which “resonated with policy makers and legislators.”

For those advocating deeper structural change, the formulation of immediate policy objectives can be problematic, and there are few examples in the interviews conducted for this study. There are some, however. Gopal Dayaneni of Movement Generation argues that non-extractive finance through “local non-extractive revolving-loan funds are important” because “wealth generated in a community stays in the community” and creates a “local *commons of capital*.” And he proposes a “transition tax” that “devolves resources and power to the local level for energy and climate action plans.” We could also be fighting for an “Energy and Climate Action Planning Block Grant” mechanism within existing campaigns for a Financial Transaction Tax, which would also devolve resources into communities. Other policy mechanisms include Community Choice Energy (Community Choice Aggregation), which are only effective if they are accompanied by a robust Energy Democracy plan “for how we will provide services” and is “designed to improve conditions for workers.”

## 9. Just transition in practice

Efforts to put just transition principles into practice have so far been limited. The interviews conducted for this study provide only a few examples. Some of these examples involve policies; others involve experiments at small-scale implementation. Some are explicitly identified as just transition initiatives; others are not, but clearly embody just transition principles. Here are a few examples from the interviews, supplemented by a few from other sources.

According to Mike Williams, in 2011 the BlueGreen Alliance started pushing the White House on clean energy and a transition strategy. The Power+Plan, incorporated in the Obama administration's fiscal year 2016 budget, was the result of just transition work by a large number of organizations. According to Dean Hubbard, "putting pressure on the Administration paid off with the Power+ Plan." The Plan is good in part because it includes "lots of stakeholders, including unions, with an economic development approach." The plan represents a significant breakthrough in recognizing the need for a "just transition" for workers and communities affected by the transition away from fossil fuels to cleaner sources of energy.

The Plan has three core worker and community protection elements: The first, the so-called "Power" plan, provided more than \$55 million in FY 16 and will provide more than \$66 million in 2017 from a number of different federal agencies for job training, job creation, economic diversification, and other programs for communities that have experienced layoffs and economic hardship due to the declining coal industry. The second element uses \$1 billion in Abandoned Mine Lands funds over 5 years to invest in economic diversification and development programs, and clean-up projects at hazardous abandoned mines that boost employment and business opportunities. This element of the Power+ proposal is reflected in the bipartisan RECLAIM Act introduced in 2016 by Rep. Hal Rogers (R KY). The third element would shore up the health and pension benefits provided to United Mineworker retirees, which are threatened by widespread bankruptcies in the coal industry.

Power+ has been greeted enthusiastically by Appalachian social justice groups like the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development and Kentuckians For The Commonwealth. While not nearly sufficient in terms of the scale of investment, this proposal for the first time puts a just transition for workers in fossil fuel-related industries on the national political agenda.

*Bridgeport community support* When the Healthy Connecticut Alliance, which includes community, environmental, and environmental justice organizations, campaigned to close the Bridgeport Station coal-fired power plant, they included in their demands a series of protections for those who worked in the plant:

- Negotiate a jobs agreement with unions representing affected workers.
- Find jobs for affected workers who want them.
- Ensure job retraining for those who need it to fill new jobs.

- Provide decent pensions with healthcare for workers who are not provided other jobs and who do not opt for retraining.
- Create jobs restoring the site.
- Reutilize facilities to replace losses in the tax base.

*PUSH Buffalo:* According to Aaron Bartley, “PUSH has done a lot of visioning around the practical application of what just transition would look like, as well as how to build power to achieve it.” PUSH thinks about all the work they do at this point as just transition work. “They consider all their micro and macro victories as part of just transition.” They are building “super sustainable houses”: “That’s a just transition victory.” They are winning and working to develop community based solutions in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors, including a new community net-metering policy for New York State that will enable low-income communities to cooperatively own and manage clean energy assets. “That’s a just transition victory.” PUSH is fighting for a 40% set-aside of public clean energy investments for disadvantaged communities and enforceable labor standards that mandate a living wage for disadvantaged workers.

*Black Mesa Just Transition Initiative:* Since it started in 2005, the Black Mesa Just Transition Initiative has served as a model for how communities dealing with extreme energy can fight to shut down polluting facilities and put in place clean, community controlled sources of energy and green economy jobs that build off of the strengths of the local people, culture, and land.<sup>18</sup> The Black Mesa Water Coalition pursues just transition through three goals:

- to hold Peabody Coal Company accountable for the damage done to Black Mesa’s water, environment, and community health;
- to permanently close the coal mines on Black Mesa; and
- to replace the coal-fired power plants fed by the Black Mesa mines with renewable energy.

The Black Mesa Solar Project is a holistic approach to energy development that involves community participation and benefits, job training, and environmental impact. The long-term vision of the project is to establish a solar manufacturing facility and a series of 20MW to 200MW solar photovoltaic installations on the abandoned mine land of Black Mesa.

The Project aims to develop long-term, sustainable, locally based “green” economies that place value not only on profits, but also on the protection and preservation of lands, waters, air, culture and future generations. It features three pilot projects that exemplify an appropriate development path that honors the sacred ecological relationships and incorporates traditional practices into economic development.

---

<sup>18</sup> This account is based on a description from Our Power Campaign <http://www.ourpowercampaign.org/org/bmwc/>

- The Navajo Wool Market Project is aimed at building local Navajo capacity to improve the quality of wool production and to elevate access to a fair market value for Navajo wool producers.
- The Food Security Project works with seven communities working towards revitalizing, strengthening, and supporting the local food systems of the Black Mesa region.
- The Climate Justice Solutions Project has two key goals: to educate the communities of Black Mesa about climate change and engage them in creating local solutions to this global issue. These local solutions can reflect both adaptation strategies, such as restoring regional watersheds, or mitigation strategies, such as transitioning from coal to solar energy development on Black Mesa.

*Chicago New Era Cooperative* in December 2008, Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago shut down and laid off 250 workers. Then the workers, with support from the United Electrical Workers union, did something that has happened rarely if ever in recent years: They occupied their factory and refused to leave. Amidst worldwide publicity, they not only won their immediate demands for vacation and severance pay; the union helped find a buyer who promised to reopen the plant with the existing workforce.

In 2012, the new owners threatened to close the plant. The workers held another occupation, organized a co-op, and reopened the plant under their own control. The workers renamed their company New Era, “as we hope it will be an inspiration for how future jobs can be created in America.” They maintain that, “Everyone can participate in building the new economy we all want, and no one should be treated as temporary or just raw material for someone else’s business.”<sup>19</sup>

The New Era cooperative was established with support from the United Electrical Workers Union, the Center for Workplace Democracy, and Occupy Chicago (the local equivalent of Occupy Wall Street). It has received financing from The Working World, a loan fund that has financed dozens of worker-controlled factories in Latin America. New Era’s 23 worker-owners produced half-a-million dollars’ worth of energy-efficient windows and doors in 2014, and the business has been growing rapidly since. The workers hope to spawn other cooperatives, for example by encouraging drivers to form a coop to provide delivery services for the company.

*Eastern Kentucky Clean Energy Collaborative*: A significant portion of electricity in eastern Kentucky is provided by the East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC), a rural electric co-op made up of sixteen distribution co-ops and serving eighty-seven counties.<sup>20</sup> In 2005 the Kentucky Public Service Commission approved an EKPC proposal to build the Smith coal plant in Clark County.<sup>21</sup> On October 29, 2009, a public interest coalition

---

<sup>19</sup> New Era Windows Cooperative, <http://newerawindows.com/about-us/our-story>

<sup>20</sup> Sara Pennington and Randy Wilson, “[A Cooperative Approach to Renewing East Kentucky,](#)” *Solutions* (July 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Sierra Club, “[East Kentucky Power Cooperative Agrees to Halt Plans for Smith Coal Plants,](#)” November 18, 2010.

of individuals and organizations filed a formal complaint with the Kentucky Public Service Commission asking that the approval be revoked. They argued that changes in demand for energy and the development of renewable alternatives made the plant unnecessary. The coalition included Kentuckians for The Commonwealth (KFTC), the Sierra Club, and the Kentucky Environmental Foundation.<sup>22</sup>

The coalition knew that the issue of jobs and economic impacts would be crucial in impoverished eastern Kentucky. They therefore commissioned a study by the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies showing that far more jobs would be created and electric rates would be lower if EKPC invested instead in energy efficiency, weatherization, hydropower, and wind power.

KFTC, a group with chapters in communities throughout Kentucky, issued educational materials specifically directed to the impact of energy decisions on workers and their jobs. They held community meetings around the Ochs Center report. Community leaders attended air and water permit hearings. They met with EKPC board members to encourage them to support the alternative to the Smith plant. In June 2010 the Kentucky Public Service Commission started an investigation of the need for the Smith plant and ordered the EKPC to provide extensive information regarding the plant.<sup>23</sup> That set the stage for negotiations among the parties. On November 18, 2010, EKPC reached an agreement with the public interest coalition. EKPC agreed to immediately halt plans to build the Smith plant and to stop seeking permits to proceed with construction.

Even more remarkably, it committed \$125,000 toward a collaborative effort in which EKPC and its member co-ops would work together with public interest groups to evaluate and recommend new energy-efficiency programs and renewable-energy options in Kentucky. The Clean Energy Collaborative is now meeting for quarterly roundtables. It involves a wide range of partners, including the EKPC and its member co-ops, the public interest coalition members, and housing and economic development groups.

GreenWave, initiated by commercial fisherman Bren Smith, is a project that aims to embody just transition principles in a new approach to ocean farming. Over the past seven years, Smith has used his Thimble Island Oyster Farm in Long Island Sound to develop a new model: a vertical, “3D” ocean farm, which produces a mix of seaweeds and shellfish for food, fuel, fertilizer, and feed. Smith’s model, which he calls “climate farming,” seeks to rearrange the seafood plate by “moving bivalves and ocean plants to the center of the dish and wild fish to the edges.” It represents “an engine of climate mitigation” with his seaweeds “soaking up five times more carbon than land-based plants” and “requiring zero inputs” – making it “the most sustainable form of food production on the planet.” GreenWave now aims to use this model to create “a future where 3D ocean farms dot our coastlines in ‘reefs,’ clustered around a seafood hub or

---

<sup>22</sup> Jeff Biggers, “[Kentucky Cancels Coal Plant, New Power Movement Electrifies Grassroot Alliance](#),” *Grist*, November 18, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Sierra Club, “East Kentucky Power Cooperative Agrees”

distribution center, embedded in offshore wind farms, surrounded by conservation zones.”<sup>24</sup>

GreenWave promotes an “open source model” designed so that “anyone with a boat and \$20,000 can start their own farm.” GreenWave supports farm startups with a Farmer Apprenticeship Program, legal and permitting support, startup grants, training, seasonal gear, and a guarantee to purchase 80% of their crops at triple market rate for their first five years. GreenWave is developing an infrastructure that includes “restorative hatcheries” for ocean farm “seed”; seafood hubs to help farmers process, store, and ship crops and products; and food trucks to “bring the sea to the streets.” GreenWave is also working to create “new and stable markets” for ocean farmers’ crops by R&D for new sea vegetables; regional marketing partners; and “ecosystem services” models that pay farmers for the “positive environmental value of their work” – for example by including ocean farmers in government programs designed to reduce ocean nitrogen.<sup>25</sup> In southern New England GreenWave now has a seafood hub in Fair Haven, 11 new farms in various stages of growth, a coop-run hatchery, and stable institutional buyers already purchasing at scale, including Google and Patagonia. It is replicating this “GreenWave Reef” with farms being permitted in California, the Pacific Northwest, the Maritimes, South Africa, and Trinidad.

Just transition is embedded in many aspects of the GreenWave approach. Brendan Smith says, “We’re working with people who’ve been left behind” and “creating a low barrier to entry to the ocean farming we’re doing” so there is “huge potential for a just transition on a large scale.” Smith refers to the low entry cost as “the nail salon model.” It insures that “people can make money quickly.” However, “the process really matters,” so just transition concepts are built in right from the beginning along with democratic control. “People own the process, not the ‘ocean’ property—the ocean is shared.” Every 5 years the ocean acreage is up for review “to make sure that people are farming sustainably.” The whole process is structured for replication and economic opportunity. It is critical to develop “a fairness model that creates low barriers to entry.” GreenWave aims to establish a non-privatized model with roles for “non-profit, for-profit, coop, and private companies.” GreenWave is “placing seafood hubs in economically disadvantaged communities” so “it’s a hub for job creation.” Smith says, “we don’t want resumes, we’ll find work for people who want to work.” He adds, “We’re weaving our values into a new way of envisioning the food system.”

---

<sup>24</sup> GreenWave website, “Core Programming.”

<sup>25</sup> GreenWave website, “Core Programming.” See also “This ‘ocean farmer’ could make you hopeful about the future of the sea,” *Grist*, February 26, 2016.

<http://grist.org/food/this-ocean-farmer-could-make-you-hopeful-about-the-future-of-the-sea/>

## Conclusion

In late April 2016 the Labor Network for Sustainability and the Grassroots Policy Project convened a meeting in Washington DC to discuss a preliminary draft of this report. The participants included most of the report's interviewees.

What do you get when you bring together leaders and activists from labor, community organizations, environmental organizations and others to hammer out a common vision of Just Transition? A profoundly rich and deeply informative conversation, and realization that heretofore bones of contention can become elements of common vision.

Relationships bring understanding, and understanding fosters respect, which can lead to a common vision. When we are together, we naturally rise up out of our silos and see that our way is only one element of THE way. When protected by our silos we tend to think our way is THE way.

Labor folks tend to focus on the immediate -- that's a big part of our job. People join unions and pay dues to have their work issues addressed and their jobs protected. So we tend to see JT as a vehicle for fighting for the needs of those losing their jobs today due to economic, ecological, and technological transitions. For those of us working on systems change, and fighting to create a better world, we see JT as a vehicle for the creation of new, locally based, economies constructed around principles of equality for all and local control -- a more robust democracy where gender, race and class bias fades into the past.

These are not mutually exclusive needs and goals. So we ask our labor friends to see beyond the worksite and look to the future where union and community come together, where unions can fight for the creation of a better world. We ask our community and environmental friends to help bring justice to coalminers losing their pensions, and workers throughout the economy who through no fault of their own are being thrown on the scrap heap of history, in a world where scrap metal commands a price, but human beings are discarded.

We at the Labor Network for Sustainability and the Grassroots Policy Project are committed to taking down silos and helping to construct a common vision. This Just Transition Landscape Analysis is our joint first step in that direction.

We know this is hard. We have to construct a new center of gravity around a common vision, and construct mechanisms for paying for a Just Transition, which includes development of legislative language. At the same time, we need to integrate our vision of a better world, a better society, and educate about the pathways to getting there. Taking care of the immediate while working for the great changes we need is no easy task, but with the people in the room we have many of the answers, and the some of the resources. What's been lacking is a willingness to work together on a common vision. That willingness was apparent when we all met together.

We know that frontline communities -- including workers and indeed all those threatened or already devastated by climate change and the fossil fuel economy -- must be leaders in this fight. We know that we need to build a regenerative ability to stay in place and not be displaced and that and that we must prioritize issues of race, class, and gender. We know that band-aids alone won't work, but when you're bleeding you use band-aids as a stop-gap measure while seeking real systems change. In other words, we need immediate and transformative elements and we all need to commit to this holistic view.

Challenges remain and the path forward is full of pitfalls and possibilities. We know we need a strategy for power to win Just Transition, and we know we have a deadline due to the alarming advance of global warming and climate change. This is a start down the path toward a healthy planet, healthy people, and healthy communities with a society, economy, and politics that honors humanity over a piece of pavement called Wall St.

The final discussion of the April 2016 Just Transition gathering identified some broad questions that can help guide future dialogue:

- The transition we are in is the largest transition in human history and will require more capital and technical coordination than anything done before. How do we reconcile that with the need for local, community-based democratic control?
- How can we combine the need for both immediate tactical considerations and broad strategic vision, for helping those in need while we fight for a vision of a just and democratic society and economy?
- There are varied points of view about just transition. How do we create a frame that can accommodate multiple points of view?
- We need approaches that can inspire people to organize with more trust and zeal. How do we create organizations that aren't strictly oppositional but also propositional? Not just about deconstruction but about construction as well?
- Just transition needs to be more than just a policy or a program. How do we develop common guiding principles? And how do we develop a strategy that draws together the forces that are necessary to recapture democracy and reassert community power over the economy and the environment?
- How can we develop a program of specific major reforms like full employment that could unify our movements and translate our aspirations into goals that we can actually realize?
- Fights must be rooted in place but there are levels above the local that will influence each fight. How can we build alliances statewide and nationwide to build a bulwark against larger scale aggressors influencing community decisions?

□ How can we build the necessary long-term trust and relationships that our conversations about just transition require in a situation we don't have the time to dawdle?

We hope that the perspectives and stories contained in this report contribute to mutual understanding and respect among those who are struggling to make the transition that is upon us a just one. With that, we think we will find a common vision and a new center of gravity around a shared definition of what a “just transition” actually can be.

## Interviews

Between October, 2015 and March, 2016 Christina Roessler, accompanied at times by Joe Uehlein and Richard Healey, conducted 17 interviews concerning the term and concept “just transition.” The interviews included (in alphabetical order by organization):

Brad Markell, AFL-CIO Industrial Union Council, 2/4/16

Matt Ryan, ALIGN: The Alliance for Greater New York, 12/1/15

Miya Yoshitani, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, 12/1/15

Ajamu Dillahunt, Black Workers for Justice, 1/25/16

Mike Williams, BlueGreen Alliance, 1/15/15

Michael Guerrero, Climate Justice Alliance, 12/2/15

Brendan Smith, GreenWave, 3/16/16

Burt Lauderdale, Kentuckians for The Commonwealth, 10/21/15

Joe Uehlein, Labor Network for Sustainability, 3/10/16

Gopal Dayaneni, Movement Generation, 11/23/15

Jordan Estevao, National People’s Action, 1/7/16

Jonathan Rosenthal, New Economy Coalition, 1/12/16

Aiden Graham and Justine Oller, NC League of Conservation Voters, 1/15/16

Barbara Byrd, Oregon AFL-CIO, 2/17/16

Aaron Bartley, PUSH Buffalo, 11/19/15

Dean Hubbard, Sierra Club, 1/19/16

Aaron Mair, Sierra Club Board Chair, 2/8/16